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A Great Afternoon for Football ... A Great Day to be an American

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Cmdr. Eric Elster, Operational and Undersea Medicine, Naval Medical Research Center, waves to fans from the field on the Washington Redskins football game, Dec. 4.

This past Sunday I had the pleasure of being a guest of the Washington Redskin's football organization and USAA during the game against the New York Jets. It was truly a memorable afternoon.

A sunny day, temperature in the mid-50's – perfect for an afternoon of football.

I put on my service dress blues and my wife, April, and I headed out to the game. We were met by Carley from the Redskins at the Tunnel entrance and then spent an hour on the sidelines before the game started.

As I was on the field being thanked for my service by many people, I was struck by what an honor is was to represent the military – it reminded me of what my job is really about – taking care of our service members (either active or retired) and their families. I stood tall and thought about all of the great people I have worked with in the Navy and military medicine all along our continuum of care.

The game started and we were on the 20-yard line, Redskin's side. It was a completely different perspective from either watching on TV or normal seating. It was very cool, although I kept on looking for the blue line (which, for non-football fans, shows the line of scrimmage digitally on TV).

The game day producer met with me and CWO Jay Anderson, who was the other honoree, and gave us our instructions. Jay is an imposing National Guardsman with more combat decorations than I can count. The producer explained that on the second

commercial break, determined by someone from the network, we were to step out onto the field, wave in all four directions when they call our names, and then shake hands ... piece of cake.

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March 2015 (4)

February 2015 (16)

January 2015 (12)

December 2014 (17)



Cmdr. Eric Elster poses with the unofficial Washington Redskins mascot at the football game, Dec. 4.

The Redskin's scored on their opening drive, an auspicious start. But being a game as it is, the Jets came back and marched down the field to tie the game. I could see the intense concentration in Redskin's coach, Mike Shanahan's face as he was only a few feet away.

Then we were up – it happened pretty quickly. Jay and I walked out to the field,

followed our directions by waving to the fans, and then shook each other's hands. The noise from the crowd was tremendous and the patriotism and support for the military was palpable. The handshake was incredible in that it represented the joint nature of the military – the Army and Navy working together like we do every day at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Then it was over – probably 60 seconds total – a beer commercial or two – but felt like much longer. We left the field through the tunnel that the players use. As we exited high-fives from the fans were the rule. This must be how the players feel – I can see why they work so hard at their profession.

We went back to the Redskin's offices, changed into civilian clothes, and then blended anonymously into the crowd to watch the game. While the Redskin's lost in the fourth quarter, it was as I mentioned, a great afternoon for football, and a great day to be an American.

← Next post

Previous post →

November 2014 (11)

October 2014 (15)

September 2014 (20)

August 2014 (14)

July 2014 (13)

June 2014 (8)

May 2014 (11)

April 2014 (9)

March 2014 (14)

February 2014 (7)

January 2014 (7)

December 2013 (7)

November 2013 (12)

October 2013 (7)

September 2013 (14)

August 2013 (13)

July 2013 (11)

June 2013 (22)

May 2013 (15)

April 2013 (14)

March 2013 (14)

February 2013 (14)

January 2013 (12)

December 2012 (11)

November 2012 (11)

October 2012 (7)

September 2012 (9)

August 2012 (12)

July 2012 (13)

June 2012 (17)

May 2012 (22)

April 2012 (14)

March 2012 (13)

February 2012 (14)

January 2012 (13)